

FIREWORKS AND FERRIS WHEELS

Rasdale stumbles into emergency. He has been poisoned by Chicken Delight. They throw him on a gurney and wheel it to a side room saying a doctor will soon be by. His stomach imitates the explosion of a Chinese fireworks factory.

Hours pass. Rasdale lay unattended in the basic fetal position. The fireworks' explosion has become the bombing of Dresden. They roll in a man who has broken his arm while attempting suicide from a Ferris wheel. The nurse tells Rasdale to be patient, a doctor should soon be free. She asks the age of Rasdale's maternal grandparents for the records, then leaves.

Using his good arm, the attempted suicide starts making a noose out of a sheet. Rasdale is helping when the doctor finally arrives. As he examines Rasdale's arm, the doctor learns that the attempted suicide ate cotton candy and peanuts at the fair.

Rasdale is discharged after twenty-four hours observation. His stomach is walking on eggs. As an apology, Chicken Delight sends him several free dinner coupons. Rasdale drops them by the emergency room and asks that extras be given to the attempted suicide.

NEVERMORE

Friday night and Rasdale is having a few at Annabel Lee's Roadhouse. Amontillado, the bartender, is letting Rasdale in on some lurid episodes from Edgar Allan Poe's sex life. Suddenly loud shouting erupts from a corner of the room. Fists fly, tables overturn and the fight is on.

A bust of the Raven sails past Rasdale's head and shatters behind the bar. Plaster feathers are scattered everywhere. Rasdale drops to the floor and crawls to a neutral corner where the bar's mascot, a black cat, is already cowering.

Just as someone gets ready to heave a companion through a painting of the House of Usher, a shotgun blast peppers the ceiling. The bartender levels twin barrels at the rowdies, threatening them with premature burial and one-way trips to the Rue Morgue. The fight terminates forthwith.

As normalcy returns, Rasdale and the cat venture from the corner. The fight's instigators pay damages and buy drinks for the house as an act of contrition. Rasdale orders bloody marys for himself and the cat.

LAUGHING STOCK

-- for captain threshold

Sweat rolls off Rasdale's bare shoulders as the sledge hammer finds the tent peg again and again. He is a roustabout with Cook Bros. Circus, one of the few still performing under canvas. Rasdale takes one last mighty swing and splits the crotch in his jeans.

Rasdale is hosing down the elephants when the fat lady waddles by with a message for him to see the boss. Rasdale is afraid someone's seen him feeding candy apples to the chimpanzees.

Boffo the clown is sick and old P.H., the boss, asks Rasdale to take Boffo's place for the evening's performance. Although expressing some reservations, Rasdale agrees to give it his best. It will be the first time he's played the fool professionally.

Decked out in grease paint, rubber nose, and baggy pants, Rasdale enters the ring with two other clowns, Rollo and Homer. Within the span of ten minutes, Rasdale is set on fire, drenched with water, hit with pies and gets stuffed in a giant salt shaker. He finds himself being laughed at by hundreds of people and loving every minute of it.

Long after the show is over, Rasdale, still in costume, sits at a mirror making faces. He has found his secret hiding place.

-- Robert Matte Jr.

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